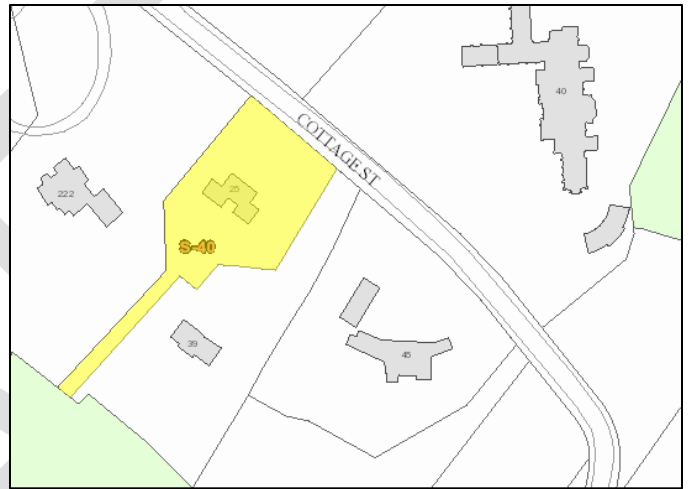


Brookline Preservation Commission

Demolition Application Report

Address: 25 Cottage Street
Applicant: Warren Cottage Ventures LLC
Building Type: House (Full)
National Register Listing (if Applicable): Green Hill NRD



Historical/Architectural Significance:

The residence at 25 Cottage Street was built for Samuel G. Perkins, a merchant and avid horticulturalist, as a summer home in 1804. It is possible that a small farmhouse built in the late 18th century that existed on this site may have been incorporated into the center of the house at that time. In 1851, the Perkins family sold the home to Waldo Maynard, a member of the merchant firm of Maynard and Waldo, who also used it as a summer home. In 1864, Edward William Hooper purchased the home. Hooper graduated from Harvard in 1859 and became treasurer of the college in 1876. In 1874, after moving to Cambridge, Hooper began renting this home to his friend and former Harvard classmate, Henry Hobson Richardson. When Hooper died, the home was deeded to J.C. Ropes as a trustee for Richardson's widow, Julia. The house remained in the ownership of the Richardson family until 1999.

H.H. Richardson was born on the Priestly Plantation in the Parish of St. James, Louisiana in 1838. Educated at Harvard College and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Richardson began his architectural practice in New York, where he entered into partnership with Charles Gambrill in 1867. He met and collaborated with Frederic Law Olmsted while both were living on Staten Island. Richardson moved to Brookline with his wife Julia Hayden and their four children after winning the design competition for Trinity Church in Boston. Initially, Richardson operated his design studio out of the first floor north parlor, sending drawings back and forth to his office in New York. When his partnership dissolved in 1878, his entire studio was relocated to 25 Cottage Street. The east parlor became his library and a brick, fireproof office was built to the rear. In addition, a series of single story, wooden, flat roofed sheds called "the Coops" were constructed to provide work space for the increasing number of draftsmen in his employ. Among the architects who trained in this office and went on to design homes in Brookline were: George Shepley, Charles Coolidge, Charles Rutan, Robert Andrews, Herbert Jaques, Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow Jr., and F. Manton Wakefield. The office addition and the Coops were demolished between 1900 and 1907.

Richardson's health declined over the years, eventually confining him to bed for long periods of time. Richardson continued to work through his health challenges, however, using his unique home-office work model to continue leadership of his design practice even while bedridden. He converted his upstairs bedroom into a working space, lining the walls with cork for pinning up drawings and placing large hooks in the ceiling for the ropes and pulleys required to assist him getting out of bed. After a long battle with illness, Richardson died in 1886 at the age of 47. Beginning with Trinity Church in Boston, Richardson completed most of the major works of his career while residing at 25 Cottage Street, developing his signature architectural style, Richardsonian Romanesque. This style became popular for public buildings; among his notable designs are the Marshal Field Wholesale Store in Chicago; Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail in Pittsburgh; Sever and Austin Halls at Harvard; as well as many town libraries throughout Massachusetts including Woburn, North Easton, Quincy & Malden.

25 Cottage Street is one of a few West Indies style homes built in the Green Hill area of Brookline by merchants who traded in the Caribbean, bearing a strong resemblance to the architecture of that region. These include the home of Thomas Perkins (now demolished); 215 Warren Street; and 135 Warren Street. A veranda lines the main body of the façade with slender 2-story porch columns set under a low-pitched hip roof. Much of this home has been demolished; the Richardson studio addition just after the turn of the 20th century and the rear ell in 2007. Some of the features that remain intact from Richardson's time are the "Marrakech harem" screen Richardson designed at the entrance of his second floor bedroom and the cork walls of the bedroom. Notably absent are the La Farge stained glass windows that once occupied the south parlor and Richardson's bathroom. A stained glass assessment was completed at the H.H. Richardson house in 2002 by the Neely Studio for the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. The report identified a pair of exterior doors in the south parlor, each containing three stained glass panels, as well as two identical transom lights located above these doors. As artifacts of the creative collaboration between Richardson and the designer of Trinity Church's stained glass windows, John La Farge, these windows were of high historic value. Their whereabouts are currently unknown. The remaining stained glass windows in the entry stair hall are in highly deteriorated condition and may be beyond salvage.

Preservation History:

When 25 Cottage was placed on the market in 1999, owners of the two abutting properties, Fred & Caroline Hoppin (#39 Cottage Street) and Mordechai Levin (#222 Warren Street) formed the 25 Cottage Street Trust and purchased the property with the express goal of preserving the existing house and landscape by finding a preservation-minded buyer for the property. In 2004, the Hoppins drafted a preservation restriction, to be held by the Town of Brookline, to protect 25 Cottage Street. Mr. Levin refused to sign this agreement or agree to any potential buyers, however, and by 2005 the dispute ended up in Land Court. As settlement for this case, the Hoppins bought Mr. Levin out of the Trust, becoming full owners of the property. In 2007, the Hoppins sold the property to Michael Minkoff (of the HH Richardson Trust), a real estate developer and investor based in Washington D.C. With this sale, a Preservation Restriction drafted by Steffan Nathanson, trustee of the HH Richardson Trust, was put into place. This restriction, unlike the earlier version, was enforced by a preservation consultant from Washington D.C., not the Town of Brookline. At the time of purchase, Minkoff submitted a detailed plan to restore the house and build an addition to the rear which would support the adaptive reuse of the property. Minkoff undertook the demolition of the rear wing in preparation for this work, fixed a portion of the roof and removed the LaFarge stained glass windows in the south parlor for restoration by Washington Art Glass Studio in Washington D.C. In 2008, however, in the midst of the real estate market crash, Minkoff abruptly sold the property to one of the former owners, Mordechai Levin, without placing it on the market. Mr. Levin used a loop hole in the Preservation Restriction to execute its release in 2013 after his purchase of the abutting property at 39 Cottage Street. Notice of this release was not provided to Fred & Caroline Hoppin or to the Town of Brookline. In 2020, Mr. Levin sold the property to Jeff Birnbaum of Pioneer Construction (Warren Cottage Ventures LLC) with no preservation restrictions on the sale. Mr. Birnbaum immediately applied for full demolition of the home.

Throughout this period, Preservation Planners in the Town of Brookline became increasingly concerned about the condition of the house. After the demolition of the rear ell in 2007, Building Commissioner Mike Shepard cited section

5303 of the building code as well as section 5.3.2i of the Town's Demolition Bylaw in a letter to the H.H. Richardson Trust demanding that the owner immediately secure the property from the elements. In 2004, the house was placed on Preservation Massachusetts' list of the state's most endangered historic resources and in 2007 the National Trust named it one of the 11 most endangered properties in the country. Despite the efforts of preservationists, neighbors and groups like The Committee to Save the HH Richardson House, the property has continued to descend into a state of serious neglect.

The house at 25 Cottage Street meets the following criteria for an initial determination of significance:

- b. The building is listed on or is within an area listed on the National or State Registers of Historic Places; is eligible for listing on the National or State Registers of historic places; or is a building for which a preliminary determination of eligibility has been made by the Massachusetts Historical Commission;
- c. The building is associated with one or more significant historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the town or Commonwealth; and
- d. The building is historically or architecturally significant in terms of its period, style, method of construction, or its association with a significant architect or builder, either by itself or as part of a group of buildings.

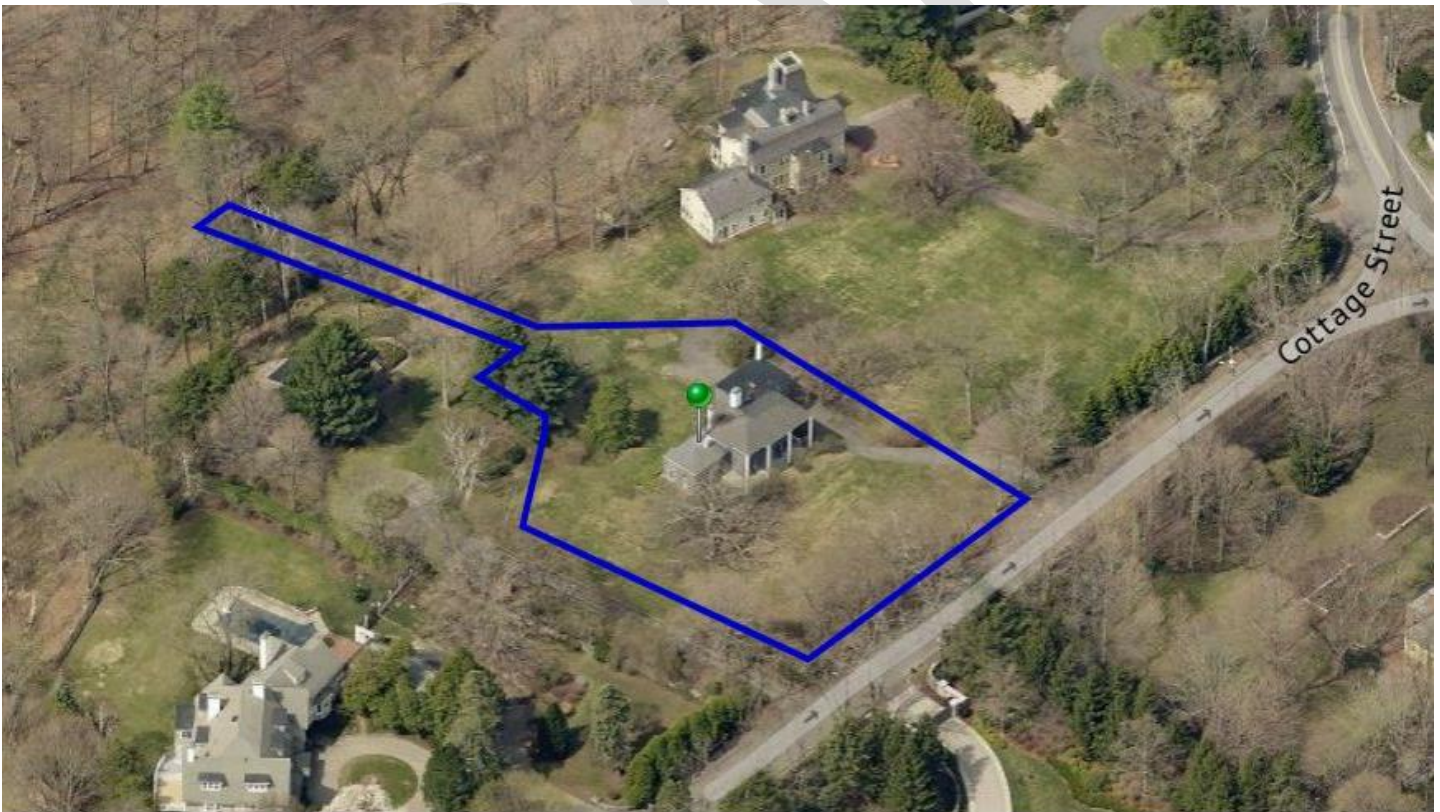
The building at 25 Cottage Street retains integrity of location, design, setting, feeling, materials, and workmanship.



Aerial view of 25 Cottage Street, looking east.



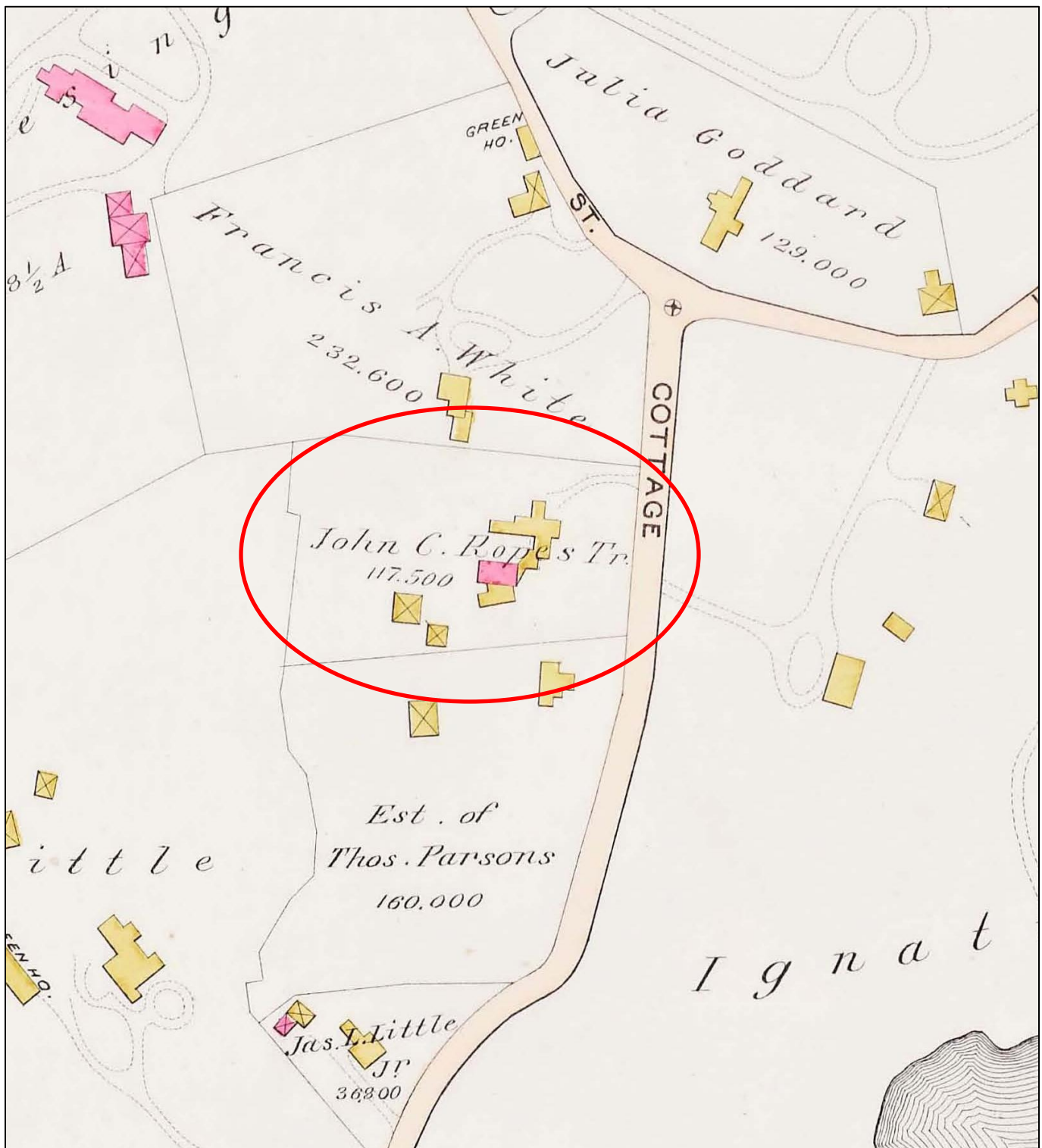
Aerial view of 25 Cottage Street, looking north.



Aerial view of 25 Cottage Street, looking west.



Aerial view of 25 Cottage Street, looking south.



1893 G.W. Bromley Town of Brookline Atlas showing “the Coops” and brick office added to 25 Cottage Street by H.H. Richardson.



25 Cottage Street façade





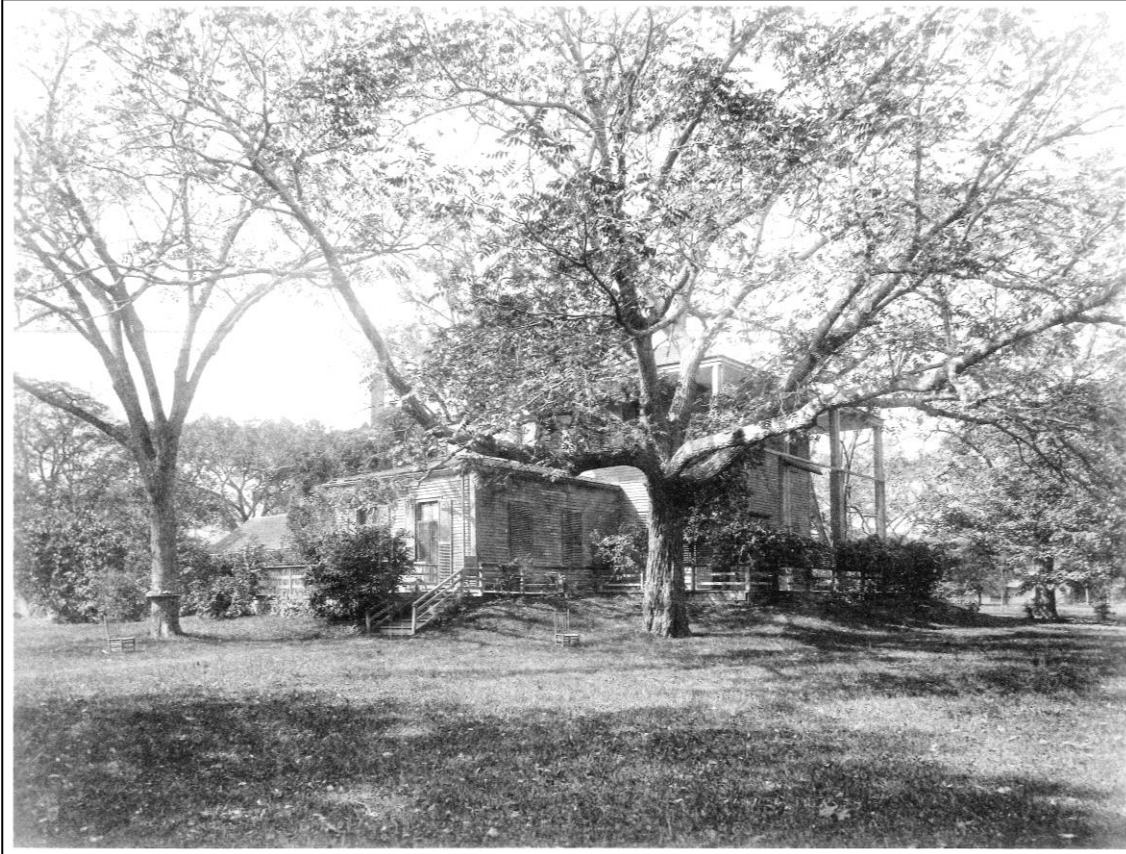
25 Cottage Street, west elevation (top); south elevation (bottom)





25 Cottage Street, east elevation





View from the
Northeast 2020 (top)
C.1900 (bottom)



East living room, 1st floor





South parlor (top); north parlor (bottom), 1st floor





Main stair, view from 1st floor entry



Entrance, H.H.
Richardson's
bedroom

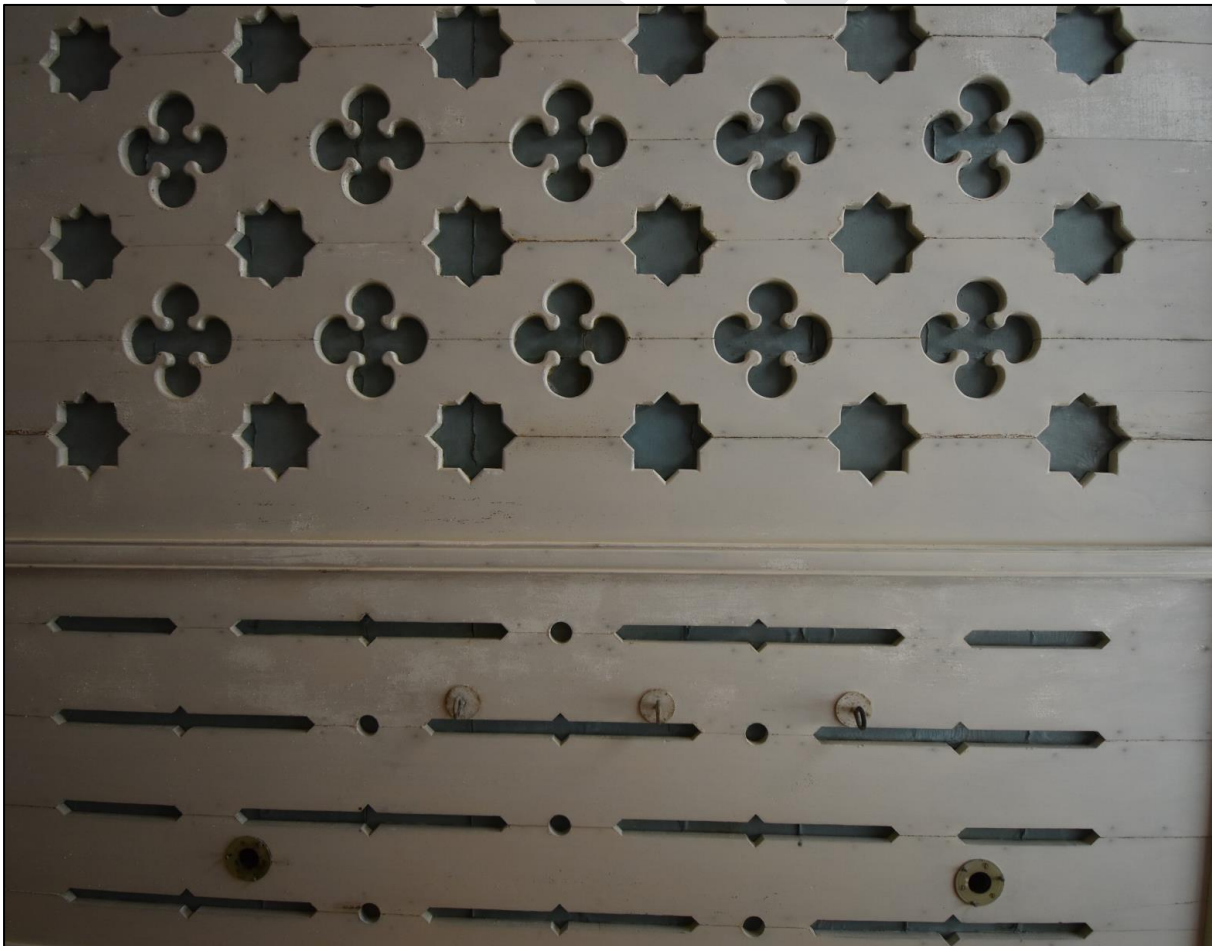


H.H. Richardson's bedroom, 2nd floor





Cork wall & ceiling hooks, H.H. Richardson's bedroom





H.H. Richardson's bathroom



Stair, view from 2nd floor
master bedroom



2nd floor master bedroom

